

News from the National Guardian



Welcome to this latest edition of Freedom to Speak Up News.

As a GP, I have seen the impact of COVID-19 on my patients and their families, as well as on my colleagues. Speaking up has never been more important and March feels like a lifetime ago when [our Annual Report](#) was laid before Parliament and I [collected an OBE](#) from the Queen.

Throughout this crisis, the National Guardian's Office has continued to support Freedom to Speak Up Guardians.

We converted our activities to operate in the virtual space, including training, pulse surveys, one-to-one support, network meetings, conferences, webinars, regional integration plans and case reviews. We have established new national networks to support Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in Hospices and in [Nightingale Hospitals](#). You can read more

about this in this newsletter.

From the outset, it was clear that Freedom to Speak Up had an important role to play in the pandemic response.

I would like to pay tribute to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and their networks. I am humbled and inspired by the incredible work they have been doing, and their enduring commitment to supporting workers to speak up throughout this crisis and show that they were #StillListening. You can read an example of how guardians have adapted to continue to be accessible in a case study from [Solent NHS Trust](#) in this newsletter.

To learn more about the impact of the pandemic on speaking up, we undertook [three pulse surveys](#). The results showed the values of guardians shining through as they continued to bring forward the voices of those who may otherwise not be heard.

Yet, the pandemic has also highlighted how communications can have the unintended consequences of suppressing speaking up. As the [Doctors Association UK survey](#) showed, poor leadership behaviours, including reports of workers being criticised for speaking up, risked having a chilling effect on the system.

I [wrote to Chairs of trusts](#), and sent [a joint letter with the Chief Inspectors](#) to all Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected healthcare providers reminding them of the importance of speaking up and to ensure that speaking up channels were maintained, which has helped to support the work of guardians. As one guardian commented in a pulse survey: *“I have also pushed the national letters messages coming from NGO and the co-signed letters from CQC [chief inspectors] to show that our local message is supported nationally and that people can see all tier level support to speak up.”*

Within this newsletter you can see examples of the impact the pandemic has had – and continues to have – on workers in health. We share the perspective of [community pharmacy](#) in this newsletter, who have continued to provide front line services within the community during the pandemic.

On the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and ethnic minority colleagues, we are working closely with [the Workforce Race Equality Standards team at NHS England](#) to help remove additional barriers which these workers may face in speaking up.

We can learn so much from outside the NHS, and it is incumbent upon us to listen to experiences from other sectors and apply them. Protecting workers from detriment for speaking up is a challenge and something which the CQC will be asking about in Well Led inspections. You can read how [SSE plc](#) have adopted a Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up approach to detriment below.

The [Freedom to Speak Up Index](#), drawn from a subset of questions from the NHS Annual Staff Survey, continues to improve nationally but also highlights variation in the experience of workers across England. As we begin to think about recovery, there is the opportunity to do things differently. We do not want to go back to normal – if normal for the NHS is a culture where, for example, [40 per cent of staff feel unwell from work related stress](#).

I welcome the publication of the [NHS People Plan](#), and in particular, the NHS People Promise which states: “We each have a voice that counts.”

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are a cultural barometer, both for their organisations and for the health sector as a whole. By listening to workers’ voices, they provide valuable insights into areas of concern and ideas for learning and improvement. That is why, as we start upon the road to recovery, it is important that guardians are involved in discussions on the best way forward.

We are a learning organisation, and the pandemic has offered us many lessons to be learned, but also a chance to make speaking up business as usual as part of the reset process.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the overarching passion and commitment of the NGO team to ensure that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, and those who work with them have the support they need to continue to make speaking up business as usual. We look forward to celebrating [Speak Up Month](#) together in October.



Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE FRCGP
National Guardian for the NHS

COVID-19 Pulse Surveys of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

The pandemic has highlighted that Freedom to Speak Up had never been more important.

As the Coronavirus pandemic swept through the health sector, it became clear that Freedom to Speak Up had never been more important.

The media reports reflected on some of what the National Guardian's Office was hearing from guardians - workers were raising issues such as struggles with access to appropriate PPE, concerns about social distancing and the safety of vulnerable colleagues.

We undertook a series of monthly pulse surveys to understand the impact COVID-19 was having on Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and their networks. Almost two-thirds of respondents reported that they - or someone in their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network - had been asked to take on other duties to support efforts to respond to the pandemic.


The results showed speaking up was continuing.

"More people are expressing and looking for ways to be heard," reported one Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. "The role has been published more via trust-wide communications, managers have been showing commitment and advertising the role more. Freedom to Speak Up has been able to tap into psychological wellbeing training, wellbeing as a whole and BAME employee networks. COVID-19 has really helped with the exposure of Freedom to Speak Up. Trust leadership has really supported the exposure of this role in supporting BAME staff and PPE/COVID-19 issues."

National Guardian Freedom to Speak Up


FREEDOM TO SPEAK UP IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RESULTS OF THIRD PULSE SURVEY OF
FREEDOM TO SPEAK UP GUARDIANS



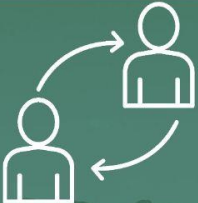
WORKERS CONTINUE TO BE ENCOURAGED TO SPEAK UP

93% of respondents said workers were being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic - up from 72% in April




WORKER SAFETY AND WELLBEING REMAINS THE TOP TYPE OF ISSUE

79% cite worker safety and wellbeing as the type of issue raised
But behavioural issues are being raised by 74% - up from 57% in last month's pulse survey.



SOCIAL DISTANCING HAS TAKEN OVER PPE AS THE TOP WORKER CONCERN

AND SUPPORT FOR RETURNERS TO THE WORKFORCE HAS ALSO INCREASED AS AN ISSUE




THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC COLLEAGUES

MORE RESPONDENTS SAY WORKERS ARE SPEAKING UP ABOUT THIS (46%)

FREEDOM TO SPEAK UP IN THE RECOVERY PHASE

This crisis is a chance to use workers' voices for learning and improvement.

Yet most respondents (56%) reported that as Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, they were not involved in recovery discussions



#FTSU

www.nationalguardian.org.uk

The surveys also helped to identify how matters being raised evolved as the pandemic unfurled.

“In March, concerns were all PPE and ‘lockdown’ or ‘self-isolation’ based,” said another guardian in the third survey. “Now in June, we are seeing social distancing, cleanliness and communication of messages from managers up/down to staff about these issues being the main concerns. As one member of staff said, ‘Patients are sorted and safe – now it’s staff who aren’t safe in the tiny spaces we work in.’”

Next phase response to COVID-19 recovery discussions were beginning to take place as we ran our third survey. However, most respondents reported they were not involved in these discussions. Of those respondents who were aware of recovery plans taking place, 56 per cent said they were not involved.

This crisis is a chance to listen to workers’ voices for learning and improvement; it is essential that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are included in these reset conversations.

Read more about our COVID-19 Pulse surveys

“It still feels very early in terms of being able to judge the impact of COVID-19 in terms of people speaking up.

I think everyone has been extremely pre-occupied with the gravity and reaction to the pandemic.

I feel that in many instances, it is only now as we make moves towards a less high alert and perhaps more medium to long-term way of thinking that workers are having a chance to reflect and consider some of the impacts on them, their patients and colleagues.”

Respondent to Third Pulse Survey

Supporting vulnerable colleagues to Speak Up

The impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable colleagues is a speaking up matter.

As the [Public Health England report showed](#), COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

As 20 per cent of all NHS staff are from a minority ethnic background, the disproportionate toll on NHS workers is shocking. We welcome [Sir Simon Stevens' recommendation](#) that employers risk assess the working environment for vulnerable workers, including those who are from BAME backgrounds.

Freedom to Speak Up is a valuable tool for hearing about workers concerns and ideas for improving safety and wellbeing. Effective speaking up can prevent avoidable deaths.

We must keep safe speaking up channels available and promoted to those whose voices are not so often heard.

One way of doing this is for leaders to engage with their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and equality network leads.

In this way they will quickly hear about concerns before they become problems and know whether these are being acted upon without any detriment to workers.

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE

The National Guardian's Office is working with the Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) team at NHS England and NHS Improvement to proactively address this issue. [A joint letter from the NGO and the WRES Team was sent to all leaders in health](#) encouraging them to examine the efficacy of their speaking up arrangements for these vulnerable groups.

We are looking into ways that we can support Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and WRES experts to work together and have encouraged guardians to seek out WRES experts locally, so that they can support one another. Directories of WRES experts are available [here](#) and [here](#).

How to best support minority ethnic colleagues has been the subject of recent webinars with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian network, including one with Yvonne Coghill CBE, former Director of WRES programme at NHS England and currently Director of WRES at NHS London.

Guardians shared some of the ways they and their organisations have been seeking to engage with vulnerable groups to support and encourage them to speak up. You can read their suggestions on our website in the article link below.

[Read the article](#)

Supporting Guardians in the Nightingale Network



As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across England, the NHS started to mitigate the risk of becoming overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients with the establishment of critical care temporary hospitals.

These Nightingale Hospitals were created at speed as the country prepared for the worst possible scenarios.

The Nightingale hospitals were new organisations, with new teams, new structures and new challenges. It was clear that in these unprecedented circumstances, the ability for workers to have channels for speaking up would be critical.

The National Guardian's Office set up a Nightingale Network, modelled on our regional and ambulance networks, to provide a safe and supportive space for the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians who were working at the hospitals to network, provide peer support and share the challenges and ideas they had used to overcome these.

It was essential that we were able to provide a supportive network for these guardians who were operating under extraordinary circumstances; in effect the Nightingale guardians were doing two jobs and working with new leadership teams. As the situation unfolded, guardians at those hospitals which were already up and running were able to share their learning with others who were on standby. Initially the network met every two weeks as the situation was moving quickly.

The core challenge for the guardians was in raising awareness of the availability of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians for workers in the new settings. Many of those employed were redeployed, or staff who had previously

retired before Freedom to Speak Up had been implemented. Others were volunteers, or furloughed from different sectors, for example cabin crew, or redeployed from the army. An introduction to Freedom to Speak Up was included at induction and clinical and non-clinical workers were fully informed of the routes they could use to speak up.

One of the issues which the Nightingale Network explored is the anxiety of workers who have been redeployed, and their confusion as to who to speak up to – the guardian in their own trust or the Nightingale guardian.

Guardians quickly established collaborative ways of working to make sure that workers knew that it didn't matter who they spoke up to, and that there were guardians available if they felt unable or unsure of where to turn. In the North West, for example, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians worked alongside Integrated Care Systems. We are hoping to continue these different ways of working, and the positive learnings and collaborations.

As we enter the recovery phase, new issues are emerging, for example worker fatigue and supporting colleagues who have been shielding. What is clear is the importance of guardians to be there to facilitate open and honest conversations.

Freedom to Speak Up Index Report

"This is the second year the FTSU Index has been published and we've seen an improvement in people's sense of power to speak up, with this year's results showing the national FTSU Index has now risen to 78.7 per cent.

This is both important progress and a reminder that more is needed.

The impact of Covid-19 will be felt for a long time, but all the evidence shows that when colleagues feel empowered to speak up, the NHS will make great progress in our founding mission of health high quality care - for all."

Sir Simon Stevens
Chief Executive, NHS England & NHS Improvement



Working with the survey team at NHS England, in July we published the second Freedom to Speak Up Index.

The FTSU Index brings together four questions from the annual NHS Staff Survey which give us a picture of the speaking up culture in the NHS. The questions relate to whether staff feel they are encouraged, supported or secure to report unsafe clinical practices and whether they think they will be treated fairly if they report a near miss or error.

This year's results show that all trust types and regions have seen improvements in their FTSU Index score, albeit to different levels. The national average for the FTSU index has continued to improve, from 75.5 per cent in 2015 to 78.7 per cent in 2019.

Fostering a positive speaking up culture sits firmly with leadership. We can see that organisations with higher FTSU Index scores tend to be rated as Outstanding or Good by the Care Quality Commission.

The FTSU Index can be used as a tool to help identify areas within organisations where workers may feel less supported to speak up and to focus on ways to improve.

It is good practice for all organisations to look at the results of their staff surveys to understand the reality of how workers feel about speaking up.

[Read the FTSU Index Report](#)

Adapting Freedom to Speak Up to cope with the pandemic

Pamela Permalloo-Bass, Freedom to Speak Up Lead Guardian, Solent NHS Trust



This year has been challenging for everyone across the NHS. COVID-19 and the lockdown has meant we have all had to work differently and take on more responsibilities to ensure excellent patient care.

These changes and challenges mean that providing our colleagues and teams with the freedom and ability to speak up has never been more important.

Solent NHS Trust achieved the second-highest score in the country for its positive speaking up culture in the recent FTSU Index Report. A lot of work has gone into promoting the service across the trust over the last 12 months, and this has been crucial in maintaining our excellent score.

We put great emphasis on how a speaking up culture has a beneficial impact on the care that we provide to our patients and on our ambitious vision of keeping more people healthy, safe and independent at, or close to, home.

Over the last few months, we've had to adapt and alter the way we work. Remote virtual working has meant we've had to create a different way for colleagues to contact us so we can continue to provide an accessible service.

We set up dedicated surgeries every weekday morning – with one of the team of seven guardians on hand to support colleagues with questions or queries. We've dealt with everything from issues around social distancing and hot-desking to Personal Protective Equipment.

We have had many more colleagues from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community contact us following national guidance around high-risk groups. Having our guardians in place really helped those with concerns as we were able to signpost them to what the trust has been doing around risk assessments, the support

available through our BAME and Allies Staff Resource Group and our dedicated BAME staff Zoom calls where anyone could ask questions or seek support.

Prior to COVID-19, we had already established good communication with our colleagues and embedded Freedom to Speak Up within our culture. We promoted how we could help colleagues in regular internal communications and our team of guardians actively attended team meetings across the trust to encourage greater reporting.

I believe having that trust and confidence in our guardians at Solent has enabled us to continue to score highly in the Index Report – people know our names and faces and feel comfortable sharing their concerns creating a safe, warm and friendly space for people to speak up.

All our guardians have different skill and abilities – from clinical to non-clinical and working across levels within the organisation. This means that colleagues can find the relevant guardian who is best placed to help them.

We want to continue to drive this forward with a positive speaking up culture and better performance. We believe that maintaining this culture really provides us with solid foundations for us to move from 'good' to 'outstanding' in our CQC rating

Integrating Freedom to Speak Up throughout the patient pathway

As the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted, it is crucial that workers in all healthcare settings are able to speak up, so that patient care is protected across the system.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are already established in NHS trusts and many other health settings, with some vanguard organisations in primary care.

In March, the National Guardian's Office held three Regional Integration and Development Events before we had to move to virtual events due to the approaching pandemic. These events formed part of our strategy to embed Freedom to Speak Up throughout the NHS in England

We received [a video of support](#) from Nadine Dorries MP, Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety, who was unable to attend in person due to the crisis unfolding.

We heard from speakers across the regions, and from different health care settings, discussing how to integrate Freedom to Speak Up across the patient pathway. We would like to thank all the guest speakers who took part. Guardians took part in development sessions in the afternoons and shared their Speak Up pledges with each other and on social media.

Karyn Richards-Wright, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian for St George's University Hospitals



NHS Foundation Trust, said “The table work and pledges was a good way for guardians to actually start conversations with each other about how they feel professionally and personally and what is necessary for the health and wellbeing of not only staff raising concerns but for the guardians supporting staff. I saw guardians speaking about pledging to look after themselves more and their psychological safety which is great as I feel that not enough is talked about regarding the stresses the role has on our guardians and champions.”

Our final three Regional Integration and Development Events went ahead as virtual conferences due to the COVID-19 situation. Recordings of the virtual events are available via the links below.

- [North East & Yorkshire Virtual Event](#)
- [Midlands Virtual Event](#)
- [North West Virtual Event](#)

Regional Integration Plans

We have published three Regional Integration Plans for the North West, North East and Yorkshire, and South West of England.

These Regional Integration Plans support the development of a fully integrated approach to making speaking up business as usual across the patient pathway.

They set out a summary of current Freedom to Speak Up arrangements in these regions and how the National Guardian's Office will increase the reach of Freedom to Speak Up into the primary care landscape.

[Read our Regional Integration Plans](#)

Case Review: Whittington Health NHS Trust

The latest case review by the National Guardian's Office outlines a variety of processes addressed by Whittington Health NHS Trust to foster an environment in which workers are encouraged to speak up and to show the organisation is listening and acting.

Our case reviews are focused on learning: learning both for the trust at which the review is carried out and for all other trusts and organisations committed to making speaking up business as usual. Their aim is to help the NHS move to a learning culture so that we can drive change and embed improvements.

National Guardian
Freedom to Speak Up

"Ensuring that people feel safe to raise concerns is vitally important.

That is why one of my first acts as Chief Executive in 2017 was to begin a review into our culture.

This Report highlights how far we have come in recent years in providing a service to support those who wish to speak up.

We strongly believe that better never stops and so the findings will also support us in improving the service and embedding it in what we do day in, day out."

Siobhan Harrington
CEO of Whittington Health NHS Trust



The case review, carried out at the end of last year, reveals encouraging areas of good practice around speaking up. These include regular support of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian; sufficient resource for the role to be undertaken full-time; and regular meetings with HR business partners to promote understanding and support speaking up.

The range of actions being taken go from helping workers better understand the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role through to simply thanking those workers who do speak up. Very often simply engaging people on that level so that workers are assured the organisation wants to listen to what they have to say can make a huge impact.

However, there were also 14 areas of improvement identified by the case review that highlighted issues around the wording and application of the trust policy relating to speaking up, support and feedback to those who do speak up, and the way in which the trust manages grievances.

Read the Case Review report with details of the findings of the NGO and actions of the trust. Organisations are encouraged to use the findings of the review to help them examine their own speaking up processes.

We continue to work closely with our partners in NHS Improvement and CQC to support organisations to implement the improvements we have identified.

[Read the Case Review report](#)

National Guardian's Office Annual Report



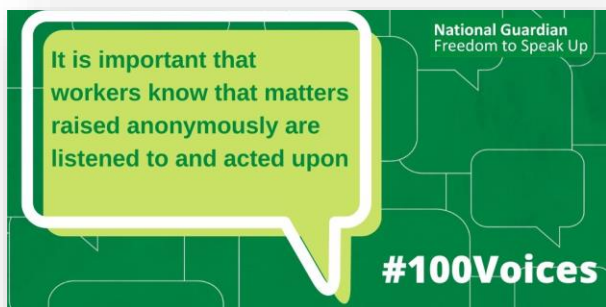
Our Annual Report was published in March and laid before Parliament meeting a commitment called for by the Secretary of State in his response to the events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

This report provides an overview of the work achieved by the National Guardian's Office to date, with greater visibility and awareness of Freedom to Speak Up - including the launch of a new independent website, the annual Speak Up Month in October, the National Freedom to Speak Up Conference, the expansion of the Pan-Sector Network and the HSJ Award for Freedom to Speak Up Organisation of the Year.

As well as case studies from high performing organisations to support improvement nationally, the report also highlights the challenges ahead, particularly in the expansion of our remit to cover primary care organisations

[Read our Annual Report](#)

100 Voices



Alongside our Annual Report, we also published our 100 Voices publication, which shares some of the powerful evocative stories which are the real-life experiences of workers in health.

The story linked below, from Salford Care Organisation, about responding to an anonymous case, is just one example of how Freedom to Speak Up is making a difference to workers and by extension, improving patient's experiences.

[Responding to an anonymous case](#)

We continue to collect stories from workers who have spoken up or guardians. Stories can be submitted by contacting the National Guardian's Office.

[Read 100 Voices](#)

Dr Henrietta Hughes awarded OBE in New Year's Honours List



Dr Henrietta Hughes was awarded the OBE in the New Year's Honours List, in recognition of her services to the NHS, including her current roles at the National Guardian's Office and Brunswick Medical Centre.

She collected her award from the Queen in March, who seemed very interested in Freedom to Speak Up.

"I am very honoured to receive this award and humbled by the recognition," says Henrietta. "I've been extremely privileged to work with some wonderful people during my career and feel this honour is something that reflects on each and every one of them too.

"Not least the courageous workers who have spoken up, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians who have listened to their concerns and the leaders in organisations who have supported speaking up.

"While we have now seen over 30,000 individual cases of speaking up in the NHS, we are really still just starting out and this honour only heightens my sense of ambition to ensure speaking up becomes business as usual."

Speak Up and Protect the Frontline

Learn not Blame Team, Doctors' Association UK

Who are we?

The Doctors' Association UK (DAUK) was founded in 2018 to ensure that UK doctors have a strong collective voice, empowering members to speak out about the issues that matter to them. Run by doctors at all stages of training, from medical students to senior consultants, DAUK has grown from a community of over 37,000 supporters which include doctors and medical students. We advocate for both the medical profession and patients, and we're fighting for a better NHS for everyone.



Our [Learn Not Blame](#) campaign advocates for transformational change of the culture of fear and blame that still prevails in parts of the NHS. It promotes a culture in which we can learn in a constructive, fair way when things go wrong, and in which staff feel willing and safe to speak up early about concerns. We are frequently contacted by doctors expressing patient safety concerns in both the NHS and private sector, who say that they have been singled out for blame.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis our members have raised concerns about their ability to speak out about issues at work, in relation to personal protective equipment and other matters. One of the main pillars of our [Protect the Frontline](#) campaign has been the call for a commitment to protect staff who speak out about concerns.

Summary of the DAUK Raising Concerns around COVID-19 survey

Between April 26th and 9th May we ran a survey to better understand these concerns. This was an in-depth questionnaire published across our social media platforms, receiving over 230 detailed responses, the majority from doctors. The results were featured on [Newsnight on 14th May](#).

Over 75 per cent had concerns about not having access to Public Health England (PHE)-mandated PPE.

There was evidence of good practice by some hospitals and community organisations, with 50% of respondents reporting that they had not been discouraged from speaking up.

The issues raised were broadly in line with concerns that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians reported being brought to them in NGO pulse surveys, namely worker safety and wellbeing, and behavioural issues.

- 58.6% had raised concerns about the lack of access to PPE at work
- 46.9% had been told not to raise concerns about COVID-19 or PPE via social media
- 47.6% had been told not to speak to the press about COVID-19 or PPE
- 15.2% reported having offered opinions on social media and being challenged or disciplined as a result
- 32.0% had experienced bullying around the issues of raising concerns about PPE

Although good practice was highlighted in many cases, the survey painted a worrying picture in some trusts of how individuals were being treated. Even as they were attempting to secure donations of PPE or to source PPE for their workplace at a point when it was not provided by their employer, some of those trying to speak up reported instances of bullying and suppression or threats of detriment to their terms of employment.

Next steps

The 'command, control, coordination and communication' arrangements mandated by the declaration of an NHS England Level 4 incident should not prevent staff speaking up locally about safety concerns. As part of our 'Learn Not Blame' campaign we are looking to partner hospital trusts and community organisations to work with us to promote a culture in which staff are allowed to learn when things go wrong, rather than being singled out for blame.

We are committed to promoting the work and role of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians to our networks and continuing to empower our members to speak up about their concerns and experiences. Continuing to develop robust and trusted local/internal processes supporting those who speak up is a crucial cornerstone in moving away from a culture of fear and blame in the NHS. We also work to strengthen protections for those for whom internal NHS processes have not worked.

Changing the culture should be a top priority as we emerge from the current crisis. Our COVID-19 survey highlighted many instances of good practice, and we are keen to continue to work with the Office of the National Guardian and other stakeholders such as [Protect](#) to build on this.

You can find out more about our work at www.dauk.org and contact us at contact@dauk.org.

Authors:

Learn Not Blame team, DAUK – Dr Katie Sanderson, Dr Jenny Vaughan, Dr Ben Evans, Dr Saurabh Bahl, Dr David Nicholl and Dr Rinesh Parmar (Chair, DAUK)

Freedom to Speak Up for Community Pharmacists

Luvjit Kandula FRPharmS, Director of Pharmacy Transformation, Greater Manchester Local Pharmaceutical Committee



During the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no doubt that community pharmacies are facing their biggest challenge. Whilst we have often been branded simply as a 'distributor of medicines', it has become apparent that our role within primary care is much more than that.

As GP practices moved to remote provision of patient care and it seemed wider primary care shut their doors, pharmacies were faced with never-ending and often unmanageable queues. Demands for home deliveries for prescriptions doubled and phones rang incessantly, with anxious patients looking for clinicians to reassure them. NHS 111 was facing so much

pressure that it was taking hours for patients to receive a call back. It seemed the whole of the NHS had closed their doors, except for community pharmacy.

Patients with possible COVID-19 symptoms freely came into pharmacies putting both pharmacy teams and local communities at risk unnecessarily. In the initial response phase, this was without adequate access to PPE and COVID-19 testing. Even simple tools such as posters and banners to manage patient access were unavailable, so we had to create our own local posters, guidance and advice until the national teams approved their publications.

Community pharmacy teams responded by using measures such as isolating areas, limiting patient numbers and closing their doors at certain times of the day to protect patients and staff in the best way possible. The problems escalated further when pharmacy teams faced abuse, spitting and coughing from angry members of the public.

Many of our Pharmacy teams are entirely BAME communities and these pharmacists have been public facing and risking themselves throughout the whole period without the proper guidance and support to protect themselves.

Freedom to Speak Up is essential to ensuring that all NHS workers have an independent and appropriate channel to safely and comfortably

be able to speak up about anything that affects the wellbeing and quality of care provision to patients, or anything that affects their ability to provide that care.

These issues were raised on multiple occasions, but it felt that these were ignored until there was enough noise in the system. This is why I feel passionately about becoming part of the Freedom to Speak Up network and beginning our journey to embed Freedom to Speak Up within community pharmacy.

Appointing Freedom to Speak Up Guardians within community pharmacy would allow recognition of the challenges faced to enable these core issues to be tackled and addressed in a fair and equitable manner, ensuring the wellbeing of workers and patients.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown the contribution of community pharmacy in responding to the pandemic. As we see many changes and challenges in light of financial constraints, adoption of technology and limited resources available, promoting a culture where people feel safe to speak up and their voices are heard will be even more vital for the NHS now and in the future.

Trust & Transparency: the SSE approach

Stewart Hughes, Head of Group Security, SSE plc



Trust is the foundation of any and every Speak Up programme – without trust, there is no programme.

So, if it is as easy and simple as that, why do we face so many challenges in implementing a system that allows our people to speak up first time, every time?

Firstly, you cannot have one without the other. Building trust takes time, and until you have proved your commitment to doing the right thing - investigating fully, feeding back and ensuring there is no detriment suffered by the worker speaking up - there is a risk that wrongdoing within your organisation will continue unchecked.

Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up

One of the biggest barriers to receiving information from your people is fear of retribution. This feels like a good place to start in building trust and faith in your system. Messaging has to come from the top down and has to be reinforced, followed up, spoken about and evidenced by leaders, managers and boards.

Providing an outlet to speak up about wrongdoing is only the first stage within an effective system. Equally important is to ensure that adequate time and attention is given to listening and understanding what you are being told and why. Understand that the individual who has taken the enormous step to come forward will very often feel vulnerable and you might only get one chance to fully appreciate what you are being told.

Outlining your process in terms of recording, investigating, reporting and feeding back is critical to ensure that the contact knows what to expect – this is your first shot at trust.

Aftercare – why so important?

You have to demonstrate your commitment to integrity and follow up where, and when you have indicated you will if you are to establish trust. Developing an aftercare programme is a huge indicator of this commitment and should be carefully considered. Any such programme should be designed to ensure that the person has not suffered detriment – and both sides should ensure that they understand what detriment is and how it can manifest itself.

Reaching out proactively in a confidential manner on more than one occasion, with the aim of continuing to support, establishing detriment and learning how to improve your process, is a unique opportunity. At SSE we aim for month three and month six after someone has reported a matter - which coincidentally ties with proposed legislation. When you say you won't tolerate retaliation, prove what you state and follow up. In terms of building trust, this is a huge step.

Transparency

Going hand-in-hand with trust is transparency – not just to the person speaking up as outlined above, but to your entire workforce. We want people to come forward and do the right thing at the

National Guardian Freedom to Speak Up

earliest opportunity so that we can support them, investigate and put an end to any nefarious activity. The quicker we can do this, the healthier an organisation we are. It is important to understand that having a good speak up platform is not an indicator of the health of an organisation. Nor is the usage rates as these are incredibly difficult to benchmark. The indicator lies in the proportion of your people who indicate they are prepared to speak up should they become aware of wrongdoing.

Therefore, we have to tell the story. Our numbers should be publicised, and our system consistently well marketed to our people top-down and bottom-up. The people chosen to operate and involved in the processing of information and subsequent investigations should be carefully selected to ensure their integrity is beyond reproach and they are viewed well within the organisation.

The development of a trusted speak up platform is not an immediate process. The implementation can be quick, the marketing can be done by saying all the right things, but trust takes time to build.

Even once you become established, you have to get it right, first time every time. Failing your workers is not an option. You may find yourself back at square one with a task infinitely harder than you started with.

Without trust, you don't have an effective system and you won't get the information you need to protect yourselves and your people. Without trust you have nothing.

“The perception of detriment is one of the barriers which stops workers from speaking up.

From our analysis of last year's speaking up data, guardians record that 5% of their cases continue to face detriment.

We are developing a programme of work looking at what happens when detriment is recorded, and examining ways to protect workers from it.”

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE

Speak Up Month 2020

The Alphabet of Speak Up

Speak Up Month in October is the highlight of our calendar – a chance to raise awareness of Freedom to Speak Up and the work which is happening across organisations to make speaking up business as usual.

This year's Speak Up Month will be a real celebration of Freedom to Speak Up and all that has been achieved in working towards making speaking up business as usual. 2020 has been an extraordinary year, and everyone, whatever their role or sector, has been under increased pressure from the COVID-19 crisis.

This year the National Guardian's Office is planning a national campaign to showcase the depth and breadth of the Freedom to Speak Up movement.

We're devising the Alphabet of Speak Up, from 'anonymity' to 'zero-tolerance'; 26 letters of the alphabet and 26 days to explore the issues, the people, the values, the challenges – everything which goes into what Freedom to Speak Up means in the NHS and beyond.

Each day in October will be assigned a different letter of the alphabet. We would love to include a diverse range of voices to share what speaking up means to you and your organisation. This could be with videos, blogs, twitter cards, case studies or endorsements.

If you would like to get involved with this national campaign, please contact the [NGO Comms team](#). If you have a specific letter, word or idea, do let them know.

You are of course welcome to create your own Alphabet of Speak Up and collaborate with different groups within your organisation to find out what speak up means to them.

To help us collate and share the great work you'll be doing, we'll be using the hashtag #SpeakUpABC

**If you have any comments or queries about this newsletter, please contact the
National Guardian's Office
enquiries@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk**

